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December 6, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam:

The United Way of Westchester and Putnam and its Hudson Valley 2-1-1 appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Federal Communications Commission consideration of the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and assessment of the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

We are concerned that the establishment of another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. For example, our 2-1-1 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We have already developed strong relationships, protocols and MOUs with local emergency services agencies and mental health providers, and we currently work routinely with federal, state and local agencies for coordination of services and response.

We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the nationwide 2-1-1 network. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

In Westchester and Putnam Counties in NYS, our United Way is committed to helping our local residents be self-sufficient and thrive in a stronger community. As a part of our efforts, our United Way established the Hudson Valley 2-1-1 call center to provide social service referrals throughout the seven-county area. Our 2-1-1 program is affiliated with the national consortium of 2-1-1 programs which currently serves over 94 percent of the United States. Our 2-1-1 trained call specialists are already responding to crisis calls, and Hudson Valley 2-1-1 is the designated crisis call center for one of our counties. We currently receive about 360 crisis calls per year to 2-1-1 from the dedicated Putnam County crisis line. We take over 1000 additional crisis calls from the rest of our service area. The nationwide 2-1-1 network is equipped now to service the National Suicide Hotline.

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We acknowledge that it is vital to establish a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, veterans, Native Americans, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. However, we believe that while it is important to address the crisis calls, it likewise is necessary to address the underlying problems that may be contributing to the crisis of suicidal thoughts. The 2-1-1 network can provide access to these vital addition service to address the underlying problems contribution to the suicide crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 2-1-1 work here in Westchester and Putnam as a part of the nationwide 2-1-1 program as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services.

You can learn more about our work at [www.uwwp.org](http://www.uwwp.org) and [www.hudson211.org](http://www.hudson211.org) as well as reach our office for additional questions or discussion at 914-997-6700 ext 716. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeannette S. Warner, Esq.  
Vice-Chair for Advocacy  
United Way of Westchester and Putnam